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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2006

In Today's Papers

Hamas Visit to Turkey

Sabah, Radikal and Zaman carry Ambassador Ross Wilson's evaluation of the Hamas visit to Ankara last week. "What is important to us is that any meetings with Hamas make clear that Hamas must abandon terrorism, recognize the right of Israel to exist, and honor the commitments the Palestinian Authority. According to the Turkish government, clear and strong messages were delivered," Wilson said, adding that time would tell whether the messages had been effective or not. With respect to criticism that came from some groups in the United States, Wilson said: "A number of influential Americans have expressed concern that Hamas was received here. I would let their comments speak for themselves. The reaction of the US Government is the position that I have already described." In response to a question, Wilson said that among the influential Americans that have expressed concern about the visit are a number of leading figures in the American Jewish community. Zaman says that Wilson does not believe the visit will damage Turkey-US ties: "We were informed beforehand by the Turkish government of this visit. We discussed our views with the Turkish Government before Hamas came, and we have discussed it since then."

Serdar Turgut commenting in the tabloid Aksam is concerned that in the wake of the Hamas visit, Turkey-US ties could worsen. He notes as evidence that Secretary Rice is starting a tour of the Middle East but "she is not going to stop in Turkey." Turgut wonders if in the event of an "attack on Iran or Syria" Turkey would be able to "say 'no' to these demands after the Hamas crisis?" and if the US will convey its demands directly to the AKP government or "will they use the bridge already established with the Turkish military to convey the demands?"

Commenting in the conservative-nationalist *Turkiye*, Yilmaz

Oztuna wonders how much of the advice given to them by Foreign Minister Gul Hamas will use. Noting that "Tehran will definitely advise them to the contrary," Oztuna suggests that Hamas "at least announce that they recognize Israel and they are going to disarm." He continues, "If the established government of Hamas is recognized by other countries, then the AKP initiative will be counted as a positive and valuable one." Oztuna concludes, "Considering Turkey's interests, the most important thing here is Turkey's strategic ally America's approach to the issue."

Hamis Leader Mashal Visits Iran; Egypt, Russia Refuse to Meet with Hamas

Hurriyet, Sabah, Zaman and several other dailies report that both President Putin and President Mubarak have refused to meet with the Hamas delegation. Egypt said that Turkey "had weakened its hand" by receiving Hamas. Sabah says that Hamas leader Mashal forgot his "peace messages" in Ankara, and issued war messages in Tehran by saying "We will not negotiate with Israel. If Israel does not pullout of occupied Palestine land, resistance will grow tougher." Papers emphasize that Turkish-Israeli relations are back on track again toward normalization as the Israeli Ambassador in Ankara, Pinhas Avivi, paid a visit to AKP headquarters yesterday, and that he agreed to a meeting at the Foreign Ministry. Following his meetings at the AKP headquarters, Avivi said that the two sides had decided to bury past problems. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Erdogan defended the visit at his party group meeting: "We did the right thing at the right time. The Palestinian elections have brought a new structure. If we try to tame this new structure with economic methods, this cannot be called democracy."

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Rice Skips Turkey on Middle East Tour

Sabah says that Secretary Rice did not include Turkey in her Middle East tour, adding that Rice might not visit Turkey in the near future due to the strong reaction of the Jewish lobby in the United States against the Hamas visit to Ankara. Despite US efforts to make "balanced" statements with regard to the meetings of Turks with Hamas representatives in Ankara, Washington had been "annoyed" by the visit. Turkish Ambassador in Washington Nabi Sensoy is working hard to soften the reactions coming from the Jewish lobby. Meanwhile, Milliyet reports that Turkish lawmakers had canceled their trip to Iran amid strong western reactions to the visit of Hamas leader Mashal to Ankara, and the uncompromising messages issued by Mashal and Iranian President Ahmadinejad in Tehran.

US Prepares for Direct Trade with Northern Cyprus

All papers carry a Washington Times (WT) article which claimed that the US is preparing to establish direct trade links with Turkish Cyprus. "There's a huge economic gap between the two sides in Cyprus. International sanctions on Turkish Cyprus must be reduced, and for reunification, the gap must be closed," a US Administration official told the WT. Hurriyet notes that the reports had been confirmed by US State Department Spokesman Adam Ereli.

TV Highlights

(NTV, 8 AM)

International News

- Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman said Egyptian President Mubarak declined to meet Hamas officials, and criticized Turkey and Russia for inviting Hamas.

- Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Director Reza Aqazadeh said all the Iranian nuclear installations including Natanz are located deep underground and no military offensive can destroy them.

- War crimes fugitive General Ratko Mladic, charged with genocide in the Bosnian war, has been located and authorities are negotiating his surrender, a senior Serbian official said.

- A car bomb exploded at an outdoor market in Baghdad, killing 22 people.

#### Domestic News

- In response to criticism about the Hamas visit to Ankara, Prime Minister Erdogan said Turkey conveyed to Hamas "the right messages at the right time."

- Israeli Ambassador Pinhas Avivi, in an effort to mend fences, met AKP officials at the party headquarters, and noted the importance of ties.

- The EU has asked Turkey to mediate to defuse the strains over publication of the Prophet Mohammed cartoons. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul is invited to deliver the opening speech at the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on March 11 held to discuss the cartoon crisis.

- Hasan Ciftci, the provincial head of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in Turkey's eastern city of

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Van, has been arrested for encouraging terrorism in a statement made to the Copenhagen-based Roj TV.

WILSON